



“The Chinese Must Go”

Chinese immigrants began arriving in California in 1849. They called it “Gum San” or Gold Mountain, and joined other immigrants in pursuit of riches in California’s Gold Rush. The Chinese quickly became targets of discrimination and resentment because of their willingness to work for low wages. Their Asian appearance and dress made them easy targets.

More than any other group, Chinese immigrants faced discriminatory laws that began as early as 1850 with the passing of the Foreign Miners’ License law. It imposed a \$20-a-month tax on all foreign-born miners. Although the tax was repealed the next year, the message it sent was echoed in a string of discriminatory regulations passed during the following century, including a ban on wearing the traditional queue (braided ponytail), prohibiting businesses from hiring Chinese workers, not allowing Chinese to be naturalized, prohibiting aliens from fishing, and forbidding the immigration of Chinese into the United States.

Anti-Chinese clubs were established and political candidates promoted anti-Asian platforms. One of these was San Francisco Mayor James D. Phelan. Ironically, what is now China Beach was called “Phelan Beach” when the State bought the beach in 1933 with the help of a \$50,000 gift from the former mayor. Today the National Park Service has restored the name China Beach, as an acknowledgement of the turbulent history of Chinese immigrants in the San Francisco Bay.